



Homage to the birds: the unique design and creative inspiration of Parksville sculptor, Mike Rebar • David Morrison

Mike Rebar: Rock Star

by David Morrison

One of the many simple chores I would cheerfully undertake to earn pocket money as a kid was the maintenance and replenishment of the bird bath in our yard. Moulded in concrete, mildly ornate, and of the universal ‘shallow bowl atop a plinth’ design, it was just your average, common-or-garden bird bath.

In the gorgeously manicured front and back yards of our own (advertising sales guy) Frank Hladik and his wife Arlene’s Qualicum Beach home are two bird baths as far from average, or traditional, as can be imagined. Both were created as commissioned pieces by Parksville stone sculptor, Mike Rebar, the one gracing the front yard completed just a few weeks ago.

This enhancement of Frank & Arlene’s home is crafted from a large boulder that was already in place. At around 10 feet wide and 6 feet tall, it weighs several tons, and was long viewed by Frank and Arlene as something that Rebar, whom they have known for a decade, could transform into something special. The end result emphatically supports their hunch!

“Mike drilled a hole through the centre,” explains Frank, “to see if it could be done, because some rock is so hard you can’t do it. Then when he’d worked out the water flow he took his saw - believe it or not, it is all sawn - and created this beautiful bird bath over just two weeks. We left the design to Mike, but Arlene said she wanted water coming out of the top, flowing down into a not necessarily big pond, but just enough so the birds would have a bath and drink on the rock. Well, they love doing it and we’ve been getting visits from chickadees, nuthatches, flickers, woodpeckers, pigeons, and even hummingbirds.”

The quality of this creation is that, especially at distance, Rebar’s subtle, cascade waterfall design leaves the rock looking perfectly natural in accordance with its surroundings, yet at the same time, in closer proximity, it stands as a beautiful and inventive work of garden art. Sitting close to the bird bath to observe the avian visitors it is intended to serve is a joy indeed, so just as they have been with the smaller, though no less stunning Rebar marble bird bath in their back yard, Frank and Arlene are utterly delighted with their investment.

To gaze upon Rebar’s gorgeous and unique work (at his studio and on his website: details below), it is mind-boggling to consider that he has only been working in stone, principally marble and granite, for just eleven years. Yet it is evident he possesses the innate ability and artistic faculty to take these challenging materials and shape them into something magical. And when admiring a Rebar piece, like one of his sexy marble wine racks, it is easy to forget or not even consider the sweat and labour that goes into its creation. As Rebar explains concerning the completion of the new bird bath, stone carving is certainly not work for cissies!

“In total it took about seven working days, but the working day of a rock sculptor is usually between four and six hours, because of the sheer physical effort. In my shop I can move stone around to be positioned as I need it, but when you’re working outside on a rock like that, it is you that has to move, so physically this is tough to do. There are not that many stone carvers, because it takes a lot of time; it’s dirty, heavy, dusty, and you need a lot of patience. You

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can’t start a piece in the morning and have it done by the afternoon, so there’s no instant gratification.”

As I am obviously no expert on his chosen discipline, Rebar’s working methods are best explained by quoting directly from the biography available at his studio and art shows:

“Mike sees the integral form of each piece inside the stone then works with traditional hand tools, carbide chisels and diamond blades until his vision emerges. Fine details are achieved with hand files followed by wet and dry sanding to complete the process. He creates freeform and realistic designs that continue to evolve as the stone is worked.”

Easier written, said and read than done, but from what he tells me this simplistic summation does seem to express Rebar’s creative process to a tee. The design evolution component is particularly interesting, however, because the nature of the materials with which Rebar works means his plans for a piece may not be able to remain...ahem...carved in stone.

“Normally I plan my designs,” he says, “and with this one I had a plan too, but I didn’t present Frank and Arlene with my drawings because I know them well, and as she trusts me, Arlene had said I could do whatever I want. Sometimes you have an idea but the stone ‘argues’ with you, so you just adjust, and as you work mishaps can happen, but they present the opportunity for a different piece! Anyway, you just keep going and coming up with a different plan, but I always come up with a base plan, a secondary plan, and usually third and fourth plans!”

Every kind of workable rock will present its unique challenges to a stone sculptor, and each artist will have their favourite to work with. Rebar favours marble: “I have fallen in love with that particular stone. There’s plenty of it here and there will be thousands of years from now, so I get caught up in its history, but I also like the colours and how smooth it is.”

Yet having rightly earned a sterling reputation as a stone sculptor, Rebar is a man who both enjoys and is highly skilled at sculpting in considerably less compacted materials. To be precise, sand and ice! He competes each year in both the Quality



Bird bath detail • David Morrison photo

Foods Canadian Open Sand Sculpting Competition & Exhibition in Parksville, and the Fire and Ice Street Festival in Qualicum Beach. Rebar has a lot of fun doing so, but as an independent artist naturally also views such events as valuable opportunities for exposure.

“I once lived in Harrison Hot Springs and they used to have a sandcastle competition there,” he says. “I used to think it was silly, and for ‘kids’ - this was in the 90s - but I didn’t go and look and didn’t realize what was involved. Coming out here, where the sandcastle competition is a big deal, I think it just rubbed off and I got involved.”

Another string to Rebar’s bow is his standing as the current ‘artist of choice’ for the creation of annual awards for the Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce. Indeed, (as The Beacon) this magazine proudly received a Rebar-sculpted New Business of the Year award in 2005.

But it is his commissions for wonderful garden sculptures, exquisite abstract carvings and practical work, like freeform stone bathroom vanities, that have made his name and help pay the bills. Yet this richly talented man is so self-effacing that he tells me, without cracking his face, “I don’t know much about stone!” Ha! I guess as ‘rock stars’ go, this one is just a normal, humble guy. ~

Mike Rebar’s studio and gallery is at 833 Breakwater Road, Parksville. Please call (250) 248-4676 and visit www.bigrockbc.com for further information.



Mike Rebar with one of his ‘sexy’ wine racks • David Morrison photo